



Doug Duncan Reports

News About Montgomery County, Maryland

April 2005

Cutting Taxes and Investing in Education

The \$3.6 billion FY06 budget that I recently submitted to the Council provides some tax relief for our residents, funds several new initiatives and continues to support our investments in education, transportation, public safety and health, and other essential services.

Because our residents are feeling the effects of the Ehrlich tax hike and the sharp rise in property tax assessments, I included a 2-cent reduction in the property tax rate. I look forward to working with the Council to target this relief to those who need it most and to increase awareness about underutilized tax savings programs currently on the books.

I also recommended full funding of the school system's budget, asked for funds to further support the traffic reduction efforts of our Go Montgomery! Transportation initiative, strengthen the police presence throughout the County, and increase Fire and Rescue Service staffing.

This budget also contains recommendations for expansion or creation of programs and services that will aid our most vulnerable residents, the environment, recreation, libraries, the arts and economic development.

More detail about my proposed FY06 Operating Budget can be found on the County's website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov.

Reaffirming a Commitment to Open Space and Agriculture

I've always been very proud of the fact that Montgomery County leads the nation in land conservation. But in order to continue this success, we must act now to save family farms and ensure that the next generation will enjoy the same benefits from farmland and open space that we have today.

We've heard from local farmers that the greatest challenge to their economic survival is crop damage from the overpopulation of deer. In the FY06 budget, I have asked for nearly 20 percent more in funding for agricultural support. Included would be an additional \$122,000 for deer management initiatives, \$50,000 for a study of the Future of Farming and \$10,000 for technical assistance to farmers.

The local agricultural industry -- 577 farms and 350 horticultural operations -- contributes \$250 million annually to the economy. The County ranks second in the state in the total number of horticultural firms. Horses have also become a major component of our agricultural industry and represent a great opportunity for farmers in terms of the supplies, services and products needed to support the equine population -- which at 12,000 -- outnumbers cattle.

The majority of Montgomery county farms are family-run, with many of them reaching back several generations. Therefore, any investment we make to strengthen this industry can directly benefit thousands of County residents and directly and indirectly benefit every consumer who purchases goods produced on these farms.

Public Safety Enhancements for Wheaton

With the redevelopment efforts now underway and more and more people discovering that Wheaton is a great place to live, work and shop, I want to make sure that we have adequate public safety resources in place. That's why I recently announced efforts totaling nearly \$900,000, that are in my FY 06 budget, that will put more police officers on the street, improve lighting and enhance pedestrian safety.

Among the improvements will be:

- *A dedicated police unit for the Central Business District that will proactively support public safety needs in the downtown area;*
- *Additional streetlighting;*
- *A Wheaton Safety Team to assist motorists and pedestrians and work closely with the police;*
- *Phasing in of "no turn on red" intersections, adjusting timing of pedestrian access at appropriate intersections and implement specified crosswalk treatments to aid compliance by motorists and pedestrians; and*
- *Implementing improvements at two major intersections -- Ennals and Georgia avenues and at Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue.*

Although crime statistics indicate that Wheaton is a safe community in which to live and work, with the \$131 million in renovations to Westfield Shoppingtown and more than 800 new housing units going up, we want to ensure that public safety improvements are in place.



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Copies of this plan are available at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/wheaton, click on *Special Announcements and Reports*, or call 240-777-8100.

Focusing on Keeping Teen Drivers Safe

Teen driving accidents have claimed far too many young lives in Montgomery County in recent months and we're going to push hard, through education, enforcement and legislation, to prevent further such tragedies.

In partnership with the Council, Public Schools and Police, we are expanding outreach to parents and students, stepping up our lobbying activities and increasing enforcement activities. Thanks to private sector partners GEICO and Comcast, we will be able to get the word out to countless numbers of students and parents with information that could help save the lives of teen drivers.

I also want to acknowledge the ongoing work of delegates Bill Bronrott and Adrienne Mandel in Annapolis, pushing for state legislation to mandate increased time for supervised learning for young drivers, to ban teen cell phone use while driving and restrictions on the number of passengers.

We've also recently launched a new website -- Safe Teen Driving -- that emphasizes the key role that parents play in ensuring the safety of teen drivers in their families. The site contains practical information that can assist them in guiding their children as they begin the responsibility of driving.

Spring Cleaning on County Roadways

Beginning this month, our Department of Public Works and Transportation will begin a 10 to 12 week street sweeping program to clean the 2,000 miles of roads in the County.

The effort is designed to remove abrasives and other debris left behind after the winter season and to improve the appearance and safety of County roads. Similar cleanings in the past have retrieved more than 3,000 tons of material.

Colored signs will be posted in neighborhoods a few days before the sweeping begins. We urge residents to find alternative parking while the streets are being cleaned. This helps improve the quality and effectiveness of the service.

Daily updates about which areas are scheduled for sweeping are being provided on Channel 6 -- County Cable Montgomery, during the morning and evening rush hour coverage of traffic reports. Online information is available by going to the County's website, clicking on Departments, then Department of Public Works and Transportation, and Highway Maintenance.